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12. Begin text of report.

Belgium

Belgium continued to strengthen its response to the threat of terrorism, with the new institutions it developed over the past several years working to coordinate the Belgian government's effort to use and share information to combat terrorism, maintain vigilance on persons and groups of concern, and actively work to prevent terrorist financing. A major operation leading to the arrest of 14 suspected terrorists, in December 2008, showed the Belgian governments will and capacity to take action as necessary. In 2006, under Belgium's 2003 antiterrorism law, members of the Revolutionary People's Liberation Party/Front (DHKP/C), a far left militant Turkish group, were convicted for membership in a terror organization and for providing material support to a terrorist group. The Belgian Court of Appeals upheld the DHKP/C convictions and imposed stiffer sentences in November 2006. In April 2007, Belgium's Supreme Court cited technical grounds in quashing the Court of Appeals ruling; at year's end the case was being retried in the Antwerp Appellate Court.

On October 15, hearings began in the case of Bilal Soughir and five other men suspected of recruiting and training terrorists for suicide attacks in Iraq, including Muriel Degauque, a Belgian national who, in 2005, blew herself up in a failed bomb attack in Iraq. Federal authorities planned ongoing reviews of court rulings to gauge what acts and groups could be prosecuted successfully under the 2003 legislation and what types of sentences could be imposed. On January 10, 2008, the verdicts ranged between 10 years for the leader Bilal Soughir, three others received 5 years and lesser sentences were give to two others. All of the verdicts were reduced on appeal in Summer 2008 by roughly half of the original sentence.

Belgian police and security agencies have taken advantage of legislation enacted in recent years to improve information collection on of alleged extremists. and suspected terrorists. Belgium's Coordinating Body for Threat Analysis (OCAM/OCAD) is becoming fully operational. OCAM facilitates the exchange of information among all governmental counterterrorism bodies and develops common threat analyses on the basis of such information exchanges. OCAM operates under the joint authority of the Justice and Interior Ministers and includes representatives from the external and internal services, the Federal Police, Customs, and the Ministries of Transport, Finance, and Foreign Affairs.

Belgian authorities have the ability to create a national list of terrorist entities, separate from UN and EU lists, coordinated by OCAM, including financiers and suspected financiers of terrorism. This information allows Belgian authorities to develop and apply a national capacity to freeze assets (in addition to UN- and EU-

mandated asset freezes that Belgium already implements). In addition, Belgian cooperation on security programs such as the Container Security Initiative (CSI), Megaports, and export controls has been generally excellent.

Belgian emergency action plans are reviewed and updated to prepare for and respond to potential attacks, including bioterrorism. On a local level, authorities institute drills of rapid alert systems, and review critical infrastructure support and civil protection and medical assistance procedures. Federal and local authorities have participated in a EUCOM WMD Consequence Management exercise, furthering U.S.-Belgian cooperation in this area. Police and private sector working groups target terrorists, the financing of terrorism, and terrorist use of the Internet. Belgium increased its a significant military contribution to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, where it deploys a force of about 400 troops as well as 4 F-16s. The main force protects Kabul airport, and some personnel are deployed at the German-led Provisional Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Konduz. Belgium contributed approximately \$33 million euros toward Afghan reconstruction and promised to boost its support for reconstruction and development, totaling approximately 45 million euros, to be disbursed over the next four years. Assistance to Iraq included expanded participation in the Jordan International Police Training Center in Amman (which subsequently closed in September), training for Iraqi diplomats and magistrates in Belgium, and training for Iraqi servicemen in Abu Dhabi, in cooperation with Germany.

Belgian authorities remained concened about potential terror activities involving groups from Algeria and North Africa, and have investigated groups such as the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (GICM), the DHKP/C, a far right group with links to neo-Nazi groups, and a cell suspected of training members for attacks in Iraq. The KGK/PKK is a known presence, with television production studios in Denderleeuw, BelgiumBrussels . The KGK/PKK continued to exploit Belgium to raise illicit financing for violence in Turkey and its camps in northern Iraq .

Belgium continued to take action in response to EU and UN Security Council actions to freeze suspected terrorist assets and to study steps to improve its ability to combat and control terrorist financing. Based upon a mutual evaluation review by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) in June 2005, Belgium was working to implement FATF's recommendations. In December, 2007 Belgian officials arrested 14 persons that threatened to attack unspecified Belgian targets led to an increased level of alert and the closing of trash cans at major tourist locations. Belgian media and public opinion were quite critical of the perceived over-reaction. However, in December 2008, the year long investigation that followed these threats led to the arrest of 14 suspected terrorists, one of which was prepared to launch a suicide attack on an unspecified location. The operation may have vindicated the Belgian National Police for their 2007 alert and proved that Belgium was able and willing to investigate and take action against suspected terrorists on its soil.

End Report text.

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